

**About the Internationality of Urbanism:**  
**The Influence of International Town Planning Ideas upon Marcello**  
**Piacentini’s Work**

Christine Beese  
Kunsthistorisches Institut – Freie Universität Berlin – Germany  
c.beese@fu-berlin.de

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**Abstract**

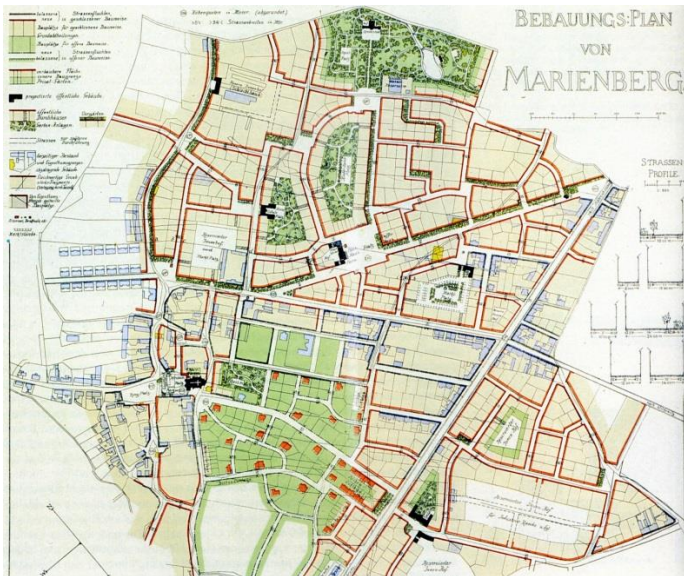
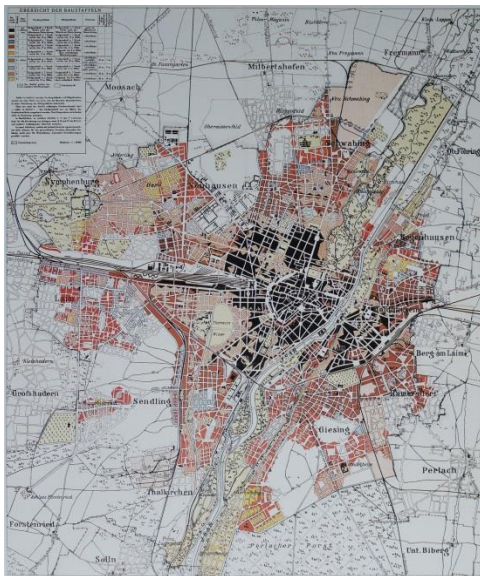
Architecture and urbanism generated under dictatorship are often understood as a materialization of political thoughts. We are therefore tempted to believe the nationalist rhetoric that accompanied many urban projects of the early 20th century. Taking the example of Marcello Piacentini, the most successful architect in Italy during the dictatorship of Mussolini, the article traces how international trends in civic design and urban planning affected the architect’s work. The article aims to show that architectural and urban form cannot be taken as genuinely national – whether or not it may be called “Italian” or “fascist”. Concepts and forms underwent a versatile transformation in history, were adapted to specific needs and changed their meaning according to the new context. The challenge is to understand why certain forms are chosen in a specific case and how they were used to create displays that offer new modes of interpretation.

**The birth of town planning as an architectural discipline**

When Marcello Piacentini (1881-1960) began his career at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, urban design as a profession for architects was a very young discipline. In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, German functionaries such as James Hobrecht and Franz Adickes had elaborated rather administrative extension plans for Berlin (1862) and Frankfurt (1893) by incorporating smaller communities and establishing a communications network. Also in Italy, England and France urbanism was dominated by public engineers who primarily searched to improve the hygienic and social situation of the growing industrial cities.

This situation began to change when master builders such as Otto Wagner, Reinhard Baumeister and Joseph Stübben appeared and formulated fundamental architectural principles for the extension of European cities, published influential handbooks and realized relevant urbanistic works such as the ring streets (*Ringstraßen*) in Vienna (1859), Heilbronn (1873) and Cologne (1883). In Munich, Theodor Fischer finally developed and implemented a master plan (1904) that not only divided zones by means of their functional but also by means of their architectural use. The so-called *Staffelbauordnung* (building regulation) forced an

increase of the building density towards the city center by implementing corresponding building typologies.<sup>1</sup>



*Theodor Fischer, “Staffelplan” for Munich 1912. Source: Nerding 1988, fig. 34.*

*Camillo Sitte, master plan for Marienberg 1903. Source: Kiess 1991, 393.*

*Otto Wagner, “Groszstadt”, plan for a quarter in Vienna 1911. Source: Hegemann 1922, 54.*

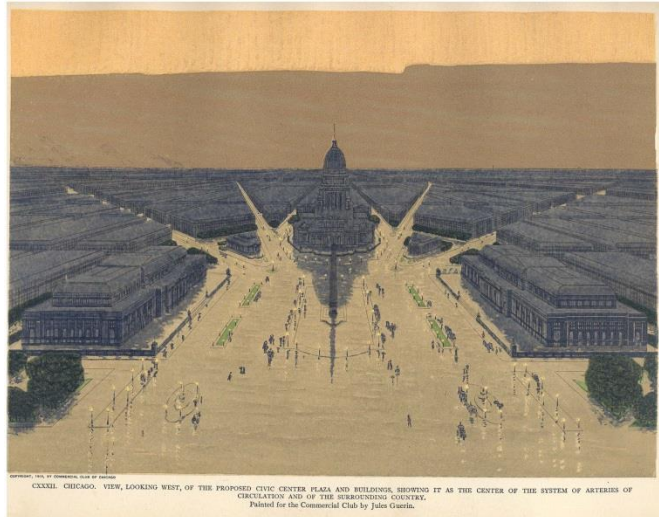
In contrast to Otto Wagner, who preferred a monumental and classical approach, Fischer associated himself with the ideas of Camillo Sitte, Charles Buls and Karl Henrici. Since the 1890's these architects and authors had called for a more picturesque and irregular way of city planning. They understood the city as a work of art and therefore tried to create townscapes that focused on the individual character of a place. By analyzing the morphology of a historically grown urban fabric, especially Sitte wanted to distill guiding principles in order to continue the construction of the town in a similar way. Architecturally defined spaces, groups of public squares, a variety of masses and suggestive prospects are important elements of Sitte's doctrine.<sup>2</sup>

An attention to the given qualities of a place also characterized the work of Frederick Law Olmsted, who shaped US-American landscape architecture by designing urban parks in pastoral and picturesque styles. Apart from the New York Central Park, Olmsted was

<sup>1</sup> Fisch 1988

<sup>2</sup> Collins, Collins, Sitte 2006

responsible for the design of numerous academic campuses such as that of the University of California, Berkeley (1865). Daniel Burnham, author of the World's Columbian Exposition in Chicago (1893), the Plan of Chicago (1909) and the civic center of Cleveland (1903), popularized neoclassical architecture in a rational Beaux-Arts plan and thus became leader of the so-called City Beautiful Movement.<sup>3</sup>



*Jules Guérin, Daniel Burnham, Edward H. Bennett, Civic Center Plaza, Plan of Chicago 1908. Source: Zuckowsky 2000, 411.*

*John Galen Howard, master plan for the University of Berkeley 1914. Source: Hegemann 1922, 116.*

Upon the occasion of the World's Exposition in 1893 the International Engineering Congress was held in Chicago, where Stübben among others presented his principles for laying out cities. Urbanism, not only seen as a technical but also as an esthetic task, became an internationally discussed phenomenon. Engineers, architects and local politicians met at international congresses on "civic art" in Brussels (1898), Paris (1900) and Dresden (1903) and disseminated the call for architecturally trained town-planners.

It was not before 1908 that courses in civic art were established at universities in Berlin and Liverpool. At the TH-Charlottenburg, Felix Genzmer and Joseph Brix gave birth to autonomous lectures on all aspects of civic design. In the same year, a department for Town Planning was created at the School of Architecture of the University of Liverpool with the help of the industrialist William Lever. Also, the aim of Professor Charles H. Reilly's was to overcome the focus on sanitary or social approaches in city planning, as characterized by Ebenezer Howard's Garden-City movement, and to instead strengthen the role of architectural design.

<sup>3</sup> Wilson 1980



## **Marcello Piacentini and the Roman situation at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century**

Piacentini's own education differed from this holistic view. He was trained at the Beaux-Arts Academy in Rome (1902-1906) and was awarded a diploma in architectural design. It was only thanks to his father's architectural practice that Piacentini gained professional experience and received the possibility to assist in the offices of well-known Roman architects such as Gaetano Koch, Giulio Podesti, Giuseppe Sacconi and Manfredo Manfredi. Together with his father Pio, Marcello Piacentini participated in architectural competitions and was therefore awarded "civil architect" in 1912 without having attended any courses at the Engineering School of Rome.<sup>4</sup>

Although being surrounded and accepted by architects that preferred a historical and the Beaux-Arts style, Piacentini searched for a renewal of the Roman architecture and for a hitherto unexplored field to leave his own mark in architectural history. For these ambitions, Rome was a rewarding place. Designated as the Capital of the United Italian Kingdom in 1871, Rome had seen selective urban renewal interventions rather than coherent and thoughtful city planning. Ministries were missing as well as public institutions such as a national museum, a national theater or an overall traffic concept for the city to connect the new Prati-Quarters in the west with the main train station in the east.<sup>5</sup>

Nevertheless, several urban ideas were circulating among Roman functionaries, engineers and architects since Giuseppe Valadier and George E. Haussmann had formulated their urban proposals for Rome in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century. Valadier, who was responsible for the redesigning of the Piazza del Popolo (1811), had envisaged Via Flaminia as a Roman Avenue de Champs Elysées. Asked for his advice by the financial minister Quintino Sella, Baron Haussmann had proposed to relocate the modern civic center to the area of Monte Mario in the west of Rome. Given the limited scope of his power, Sella opted instead for the implementation of an axis of ministries close to the eastern main station (Via XX Settembre).<sup>6</sup>

But as in Austria, Belgium and Germany, the urbanistic doctrine had also changed in Italy around 1900. The Roman Artistic Association of Architects and Conservators, cofounded by Pio Piacentini in 1890, dedicated itself to the preservation and restoration of historic monuments. To counteract the extensive demolitions undertaken by a hygienist form of urbanism, the association started to deal with the latest ideas of civic design. The associated architects, engineers and local politicians invited Charles Buls to give a public talk on the Campidoglio in 1902. In his conference, Buls strengthened the importance of the surroundings for the perception of a monument, an argument already dear to the Roman associate Gustavo Giovannoni.<sup>7</sup>

Marcello Piacentini was familiar with these urbanistic proposals and tendencies when he joined the Association in 1905. A catalyst for Piacentini's engagement in the Association might have been its involvement in the elaboration of a new Roman master-plan. The associates formulated urbanistic requirements to be fulfilled by the responsible communal engineer, Edmondo Sanjust di Teulada. Furthermore, Piacentini appreciated Giovannoni's struggle for establishing an integrated education of architects and engineers in an independent

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<sup>4</sup> Lupano 1991

<sup>5</sup> Ciucci 1984

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> AACA 1902

school of architecture. When the roman school finally opened its doors in 1920, Piacentini was the first in Italy to hold a chair in civic and landscape design.<sup>8</sup>

Following the example of German zoning principles, Teulada's roman master plan (1908) divided the city into different functional zones. Whereas the city center should face only limited interventions, extension-zones should adopt modern functions. The new residential quarter's density was regulated by the required building typology. Industries were planned to be situated around San Paolo in the south, the university city in the north of Termini, a sporting and cultural zone close to Valle Giulia and ministries around Piazza d'Armi in the west. Although Piazza Colonna should not remain the center of daily affairs, a lack of public transport service made it impossible to displace these activities.<sup>9</sup>



*Edmondo Sanjust di Teulada, master plan for the City of Rome 1908. Source: Teulada 2008, appendix.*

### **Piacentini in contact with foreign town planning schemes**

An international exposition was to be held in Turin, Florence and Rome on occasion of the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Italian Kingdom in 1911. The celebrations gave reason to realize architectural infrastructures, such as the national art museum in Valle Giulia (behind the Villa Borghese) and the exhibition zone for regional pavilions around Piazza d'Armi. Thanks to his friendship with the socialist mayor Ernesto Nathan, Piacentini was assigned to design the so-called Forum of Regions, later to become a residential quarter of Rome. In addition Piacentini erected a national stadium between Valle Giulia and Piazza d'Armi. For both projects he chose a historicist beaux-arts design, close to the taste of the father's generation.<sup>10</sup>

The roman exposition enabled Piacentini to get in contact with the current trends abroad. Only one year after having built the British pavilion (today's home of the British School of Rome), Edwin Lutyens joined the New Delhi Town Planning Commission and elaborated a *Beaux Arts* master plan for the new governmental city center. Josef Hoffmann's Austrian pavilion, a very rational, neoclassicist building, aroused Piacentini's interest in the secession's

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<sup>8</sup> Nicoloso 2004; Berta 2005

<sup>9</sup> Sanjust di Teulada 2008; Fraticelli 1982; Insolera 1998

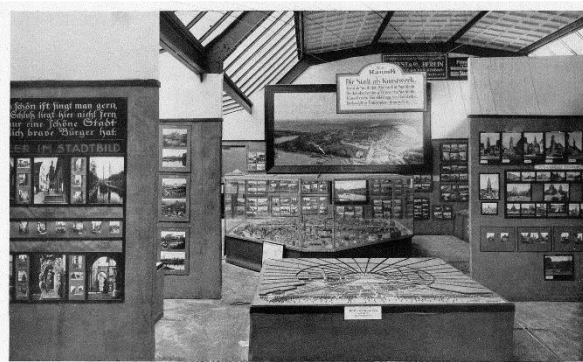
<sup>10</sup> Toschi 1990; Piantoni 1980

movement. During the international architects' congress, Piacentini made personal acquaintance with Stübben, who presented his own ideas to improve the new roman master plan.<sup>11</sup>

Motivated by these contacts, Piacentini seized the opportunity to travel to Germany under the auspices of the Architect's Association in 1913. He visited the Mathildenhöhe in Darmstadt, the Baufachausstellung in Leipzig and other German cities such as Munich and Berlin. In Leipzig he saw the garden city Marienbrunn and was informed about the latest international town-planning schemes, such as the competition for a Greater Berlin (1910) or the Green-belt plans for Chicago and Vienna, which were exposed at the Town Planning Exhibition. He probably also bought Werner Hegemann's exposition catalogue, which was published on occasion of the Berlin competition in 1913 and depicted the contributions as well as other international examples of civic design.<sup>12</sup>



*Marcello Piacentini,  
Pavilion for the Forum of Regions, Rome  
1911. Source: Ciucci 2004, 30.*



*Internationale Baufach Ausstellung Leipzig  
1913, view into the „the city as work of art“  
room. Source: Herzog 1914, 274.*

After being awarded first prize for his contribution to the world's fair held in Brussels in 1910, Piacentini was sent to the Panama Pacific International Exhibition in San Francisco in 1915. At the exhibition he did not only design the very successful Cittadella Italiana, he also became witness of the city beautiful movement's attempts to improve the city by integrating the waterside and by creating a monumental civic center. On his way to San Francisco, Piacentini had stopped in New York, Chicago and Buffalo, where he was impressed by the skyscrapers and the efficient traffic system. This included especially the Grand Central Terminal and the Penn Station in New York, where railways and tubes circulated under a building-complex of shops, offices and hotels, left a persistent mark.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Stübben 1914; Brüstlein 1911

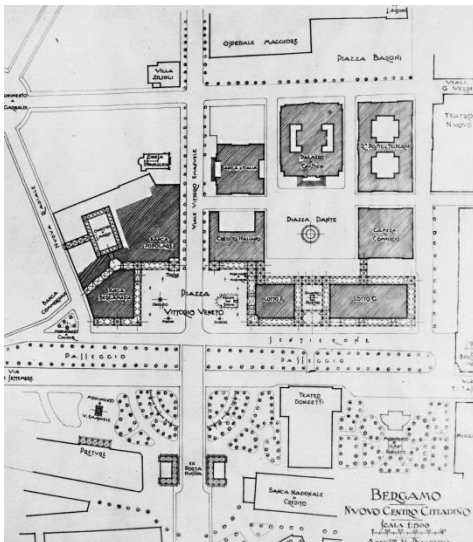
<sup>12</sup> Piacentini 1914; Herzog, Miederer 1917; Bodenschatz 2010

<sup>13</sup> Lupano 1991; Buscioni 1990

## First projects of civic design – Piacentini in Sitte's and Stübben's footsteps

Piacentini's first urbanistic attempts date back to the year 1907 when his competition entry for the redesign of the lower city of Bergamo won the first prize. Together with the engineer Giuseppe Quaroni, Piacentini had submitted a master plan for a modern civic center by creating two distinctive squares next to each other. Piazza Cavour was characterized by a row of buildings that created a vivid and varied silhouette, framing the panorama of the *città alta*. Obviously Piacentini followed the principles formulated by Sitte and Buls to obtain a picturesque townscape in continuity with the conveyed urban morphology.

The layout of Piazza Dante was fixed in 1909 and harkens back to a symmetrical *Beaux Arts* scheme of 1889. The palace of justice, the main building of the closed square in terms of function and of urban hierarchy is situated in the line of sight with the existing Teatro Donizetti. The small administration square can be read as an Italian variant of the monumental American civic center, modified by picturesque elements that ensure a site specific design. Arcades connect the buildings as well as the two squares and allow for perspectives to the surrounding city. The shift of the civic center from the higher to the lower city helped to conserve the historic buildings of the old town and received rave reviews by critics and citizens.<sup>14</sup>



*Marcello Piacentini, master plan for Lower Bergamo 1909. Source: Papini 1929, 38.*

*Piazza Dante in Bergamo, view from Teatro Donizetti to the Palace of Justice. Source: Papini 1929, 95.*

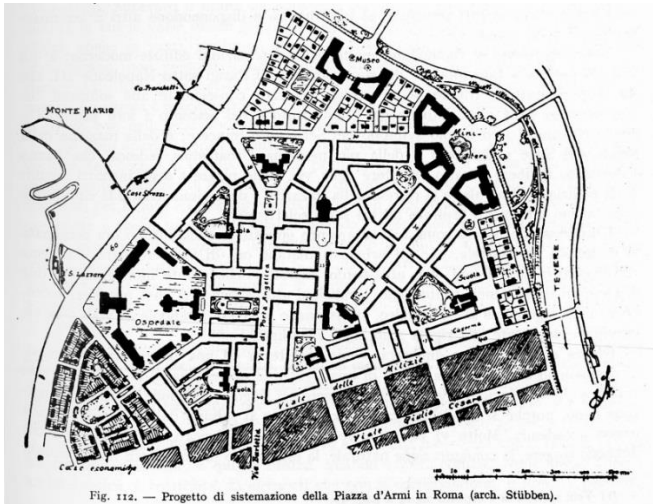
*Panorama of Bergamo, seen from the new Civic Center. Source: Forno 2001, 129.*

<sup>14</sup> Papini 1929; Forno 2001



When Teuladas' plan to implement the new quarter of ministries around the Piazza d'Armi failed, Piacentini and Giovannoni developed a new master plan that took up elements of the variant presented by Stübben in 1911. In contrast to Teulada, Stübben had tried to dispose of functional and formal units that consist of regular lots, enclosed squares and singled out main streets and main buildings. On the basis of this plan Piacentini and Giovannoni connected the Armi-Quarter to the Flaminio-Quartier across the river and integrated visuals to important roman monuments and suggestive landscapes. The layout of regular lots had, meanwhile, become impossible due to the already existing layout of Piazza Mazzini.<sup>15</sup>

Also in 1914 Piacentini and Giovannoni gained the possibility to redesign the master plan for Ostia Marittima, a seaside resort promoted by Paolo Orlando as an instrument to connect Rome to the Tyrrhenian Coast. The former *Beaux Arts* scheme was replaced by a zoning plan that divided areas for citizens from those for visitors. A group of separated squares fulfilled specific functions (market, church, public reunion) and were architectonically formed. Due to its topographical position, each house was provided with a sea view. Especially the layout of the inner market square and the quiet church square seem to be taken from Sitte's plan for Marienberg (1903).<sup>16</sup>



*Joseph Stübben, master plan for the new Armi-Quarter, Rome 1911. Source: Stübben 1913, 181.*

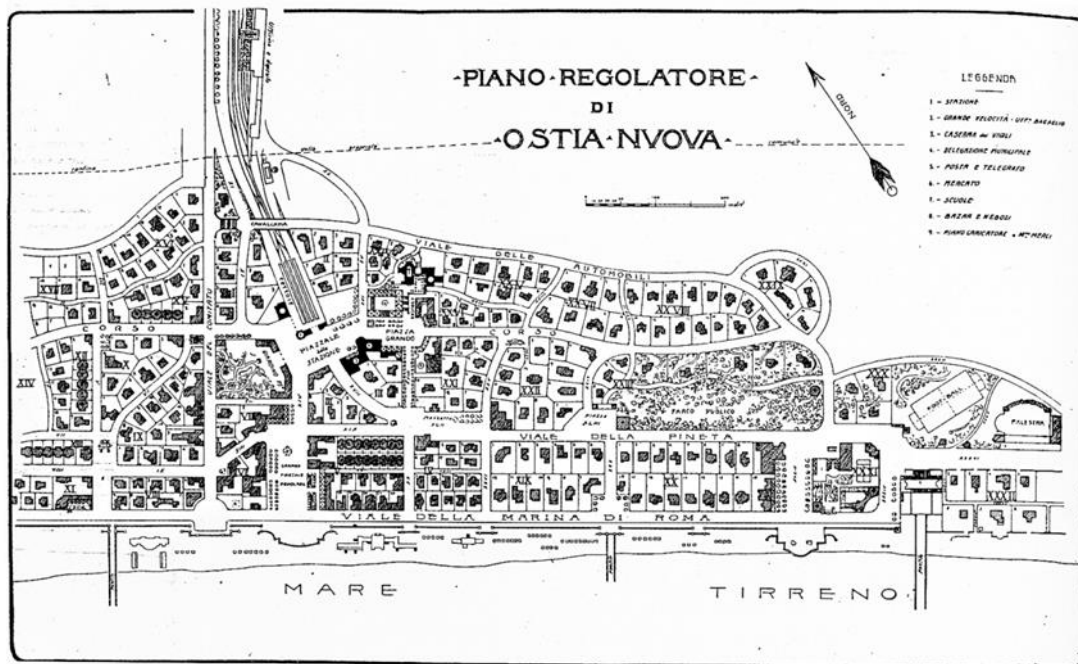


*Marcello Piacentini, Gustavo Giovannoni a.o., master plan for Piazza d'Armi and the Flaminio-Quarter, Rome 1915. Source: Giovannoni 1915, plate II.*

<sup>15</sup> Giovannoni 1915

<sup>16</sup> Giovannoni, Piacentini 1915; Greco 2007





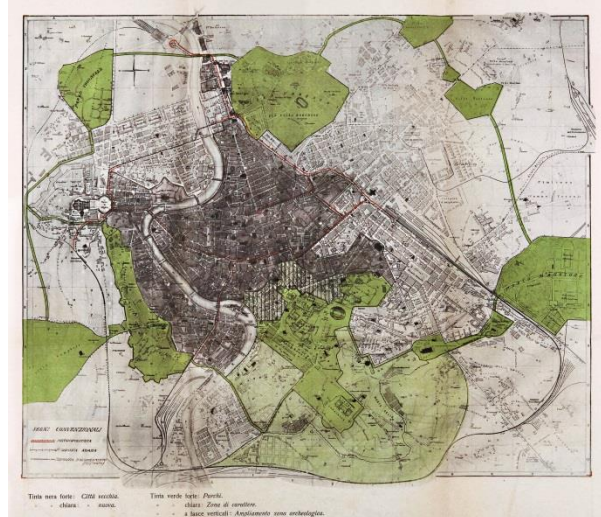
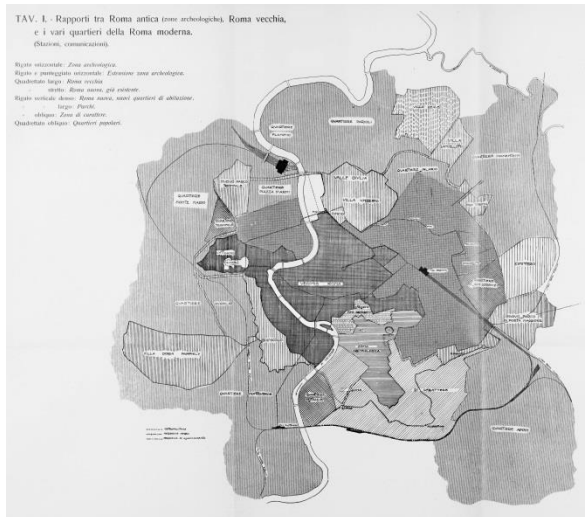
*Marcello Piacentini, Gustavo Giovannoni a.o., master plan for the Sea Resort “Ostia Nuova” 1915. Source: Giovannoni 1915, plate V.*

The three examples of Bergamo, Piazza d’Armi and Ostia Marittima represent three variants of urban extension. In Bergamo, a new town-center was built next to the old one and absorbed the functions of the latter. Piazza d’Armi was created as an auto sufficient quarter attached to the already polycentric city. Ostia Marittima, likewise auto sufficient, can be called a suburban municipality with a specific function in regard to the capital city. After its connection to Rome by a railway it became a popular leisure zone for urban dweller. These experiences revealed the importance of a functional communication system to Piacentini to make the extension zones accessible.

### **Comprehensive studies for city expansion**

When Piacentini returned from the United States in 1915, Italy had entered the First World War. Piacentini stayed in Rome, recapitulated his travel experiences and drafted his first town planning study for the whole city of Rome. He combined functional zoning with a shift of the civic center to safeguard the historic fabric, a public transport service and public parks, connected in form of a green belt. The historic center should remain the ideational core of the city; the frequented public offices should be regrouped in Flaminio as a new business center next to the river, comparable to those of London or Paris.<sup>17</sup>

<sup>17</sup> Piacentini 1916



*Marcello Piacentini, zoning plan as part of the town development study for Rome 1915. Source: Piacentini 1916, appendix.*

*Marcello Piacentini, greenbelt plan as part of the town development study for Rome 1915. Source: Piacentini 1916, appendix.*

The two existing terminal stations Termini (east) and Trastevere (west) were replenished by a third station in the north and connected by a subway system, analog to the model of New York and Paris. Piacentini also proposes the valorization of the northern areas Monte Mario, Parioli or Pineta Sacchetti through transport connection to create new quarters resembling Milanino in Milan or Oberkassel in Düsseldorf.<sup>18</sup> Following Piacentini, upper class suburbs such as Richmond in London, Rhode Island in New York and Longchamp in Paris could emerge along Via Appia and outside of Rome in the Alban Hills. In tradition of the British garden city ideal, two working class suburbs are proposed for Portonaccio and Magliana.

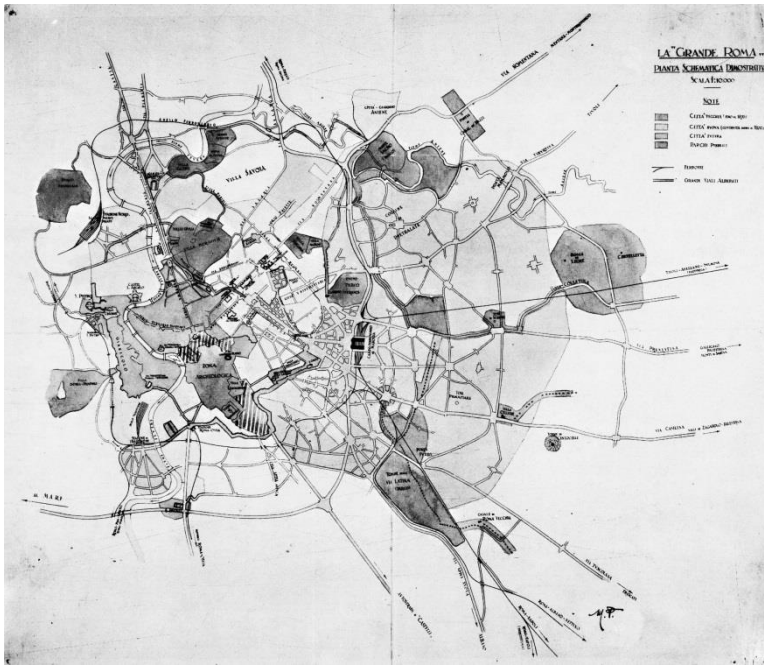
The greenbelt idea was taken directly from Burnham's Chicago Plan and applied to connect present and foreseen public parks by a parkway, namely Villa Borghese, Parco Trionfale, Villa Pamphili/Gianicolo, Passeggiata archeologica, Parco Maggiore, Villa Torlonia and Villa Lancellotti. At that time, the scheme was popular all over Europe – Berlin, Paris and Vienna showed greenbelt plans at the exhibitions in Berlin (1911) and Leipzig (1913). In 1909, Nicodemo Severi had already published his ideas for a park system in Rome. The concept of green corridors, of well-connected new quarters and of a shifted modern city center will characterize all of Piacentini's future proposals for Rome.<sup>19</sup>

In 1925, when Mussolini had come to power and Rome was under the fascist government, Piacentini updated his study for a "Greater Rome" by proposing a new direction of expansion. Not the Flaminio-area but the zone around Termini-station should become the new modern civic center. Together with the Roman Urbanist Group (GUR), led by his student Luigi Piccinato, Piacentini presented a first regional plan for the roman area in 1929. The project combines Piacentini's proposal from 1915 (to include Ostia and the Alban Hills in an urbanistic concept) with that of 1925 (to expand the city in an eastward direction).<sup>20</sup>

<sup>18</sup> Piacentini 1916, 3; Piacentini 1917, 205-211

<sup>19</sup> Piacentini 1921; Duempelmann 2009

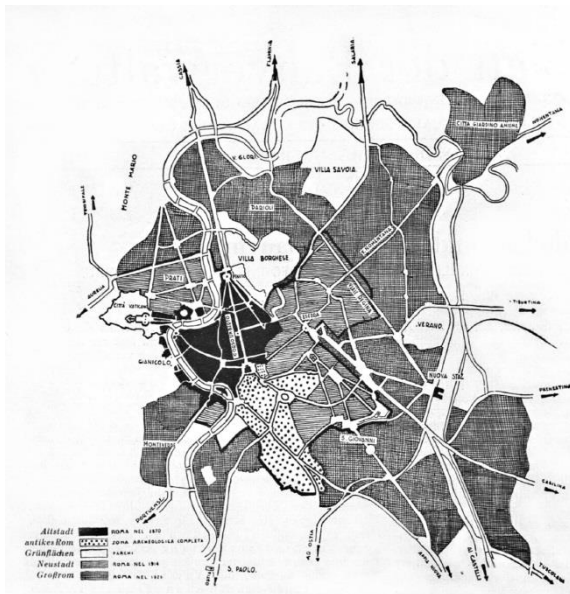
<sup>20</sup> Piacentini 1925; Ciucci 2010



*Marcello Piacentini, town development study “La Grande Roma” 1925. Source: Piacentini 1925, 417.*

*Gruppo degli Urbanisti Romani (GUR), zoning plan for Rome 1929. Source: Lampmann 1929, 846.*

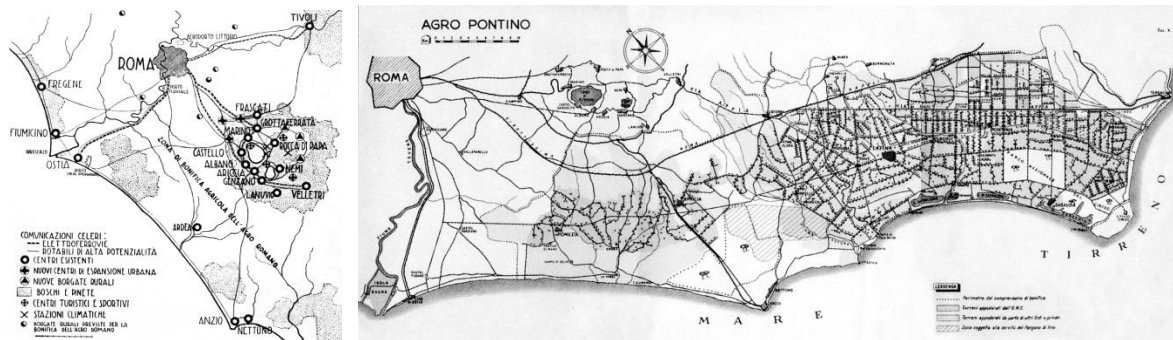
*GUR, greenbelt Plan for Rome 1929. Source: Piacentini 1931, appendix.*



## Regional Planning

It was not by chance, that the GUR’s plan was presented in 1929. The future design of the city had become a main topic for the fascist government and in several occasions Mussolini had expressed his desire for a representative but modern Rome. The diverse ideas Mussolini had put together in his speeches were taken from differing authors, times and conceptual backgrounds. On the one hand he wished for a monumental center, on the other hand he propagated a city-antagonistic ruralisation. This ambiguity created a strong concurrence among roman architects like Brasini, Giovannoni and Piacentini, who tended to interpret Mussolinis words in favor of their own urbanistic concept.

Upon the occasion of the Town Planning Exhibition in Rome in 1929 Piacentini and the GUR presented their regional planning scheme, based on the creation of new suburbs in the Alban Hills and on the integration of existing settlements at the coast. As a jury member, Piacentini had recognized Cesare Chiodis entry for the Greater-Milan Town Planning competition in 1926. While Virgilio Testa propagated a linear town and Dario Barbieris stood out for a star-shaped extension, Piacentini and Piccinato wanted to adopt Chiodis concept of a dense and clearly defined city, surrounded by well-connected but independent villages. In New York the Russel Sage Foundation in 1923 had called this approach “metropolitanism”.<sup>21</sup>



*GUR, regional Plan for Rome 1929. Source: Piacentini 1931, appendix.*

*Site plan of the ONC-settlements on the Pontine Marshes. Source: Muntoni 2010, 423.*

Simultaneously another concept of decentralization occurred at the roman exhibition. Due to Mussolinis ruralisation campaign, the Pontine Marshes had become especially an object of discussion. The veteran’s organization *Opera Nazionale Combattenti* (ONC), which had started to prepare the land for settlement, exposed a land-use plan showing small rural villages like Littoria or Guidonia. Similar to the American New Towns, built with regard to Roosevelt’s New Deal politics, these villages were not related to a main city but formed a net of individual settlements. The idea of an agrarian individualism will culminate 1935 in Frank Lloyd Wright’s Broadacre City that sought for dissolution of the compact city.<sup>22</sup>

The named exhibition was part of a Conference organized by the International Federation for Housing and Town Planning in Rome in 1929. Together with the German Robert Schmidt, founding father of the Settlement Association of the Ruhr Coal Area in 1920 (SVR) and author of a Ruhr-Region plan in 1912, Piacentini conducted a session and was exposed to a third way of regional planning; regional planning was seen as the coordination of urban agglomerations and independent cities by regional streets and green corridors. Whereas those regional plans had already been designed for New York, Boston and Berlin, the SVR was the first to be endowed with defined competences.<sup>23</sup>

Although Piacentini supported the idea of decentralization to avoid an unregulated spread of urban agglomeration, he criticized the planning of the Pontine Marshes. In contrast to the fascist propaganda, the creation of these rural villages was not a result of a demand responsive planning. Neither did the villages address specified functions nor were they auto-sufficient. In Piacentinis opinion, only autarkic settlements, harmonized with the surrounding villages

<sup>21</sup> Piccinato 1928; Piacentini 1927; Meyers 1988

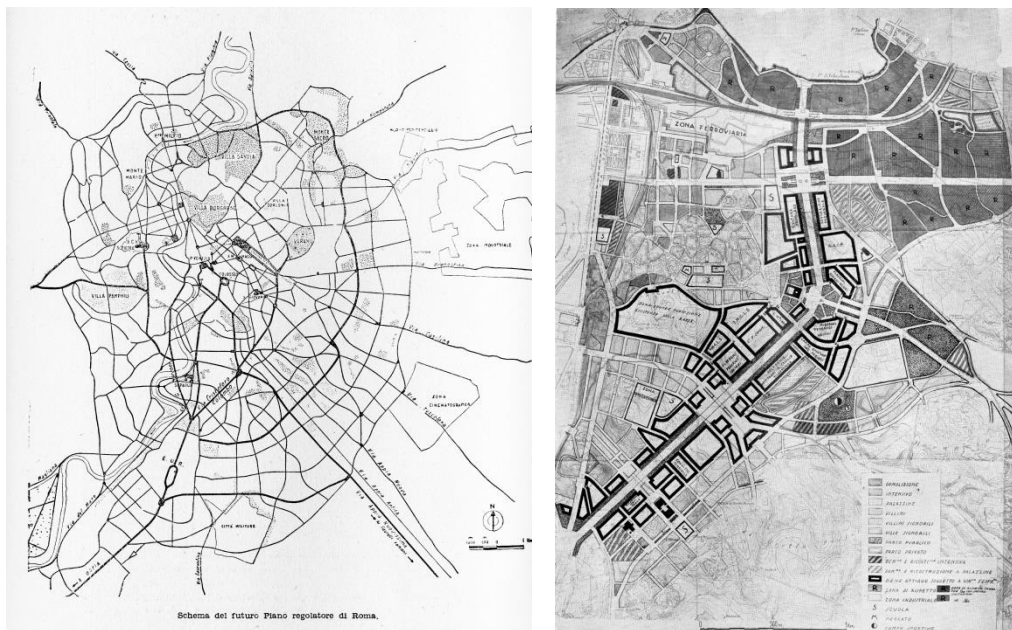
<sup>22</sup> Wright 1932; Ghirardo 1989; Riboldazzi 2009

<sup>23</sup> Kastorff-Viehmann, Utku 2014; Riboldazzi 2008; Piacentini 1927



could be a reasonable solution. In 1942 Piacentini stated that nearly all garden-cities in Italy and abroad had failed due to their improper decentralisation-criteria. In his opinion only a well-coordinated regional plan permits the successful implementation of new towns.<sup>24</sup>

Piacentini was a supporter of the dense urban city and the capital remained the point of reference for all regional planning. When the roman government was in search for an area suitable for the World's Exhibition of 1942, Piacentini stressed his idea of a polycentric city and advocated a position attached to the existing city. The exhibition quarter was to become a new part of the extending fabric and should be connected to the city's core by an urban street called Via Imperiale. Already in 1921, Piacentini had rejected a strict division of functions. In his opinion a total separation of residential and business quarters entail inconveniences for the inhabitants, who in consequence experience neither the advantages of the city nor those of the countryside.<sup>25</sup>



Marcello Piacentini a.o., master plan for Rome 1942. Source: Piacentini 1952, 30.

Marcello Piacentini, "Via Imperiale" between EUR and the Aurelian Wall, Rome 1939. Source: *Architettura fasc. speciale* (1939), 21.

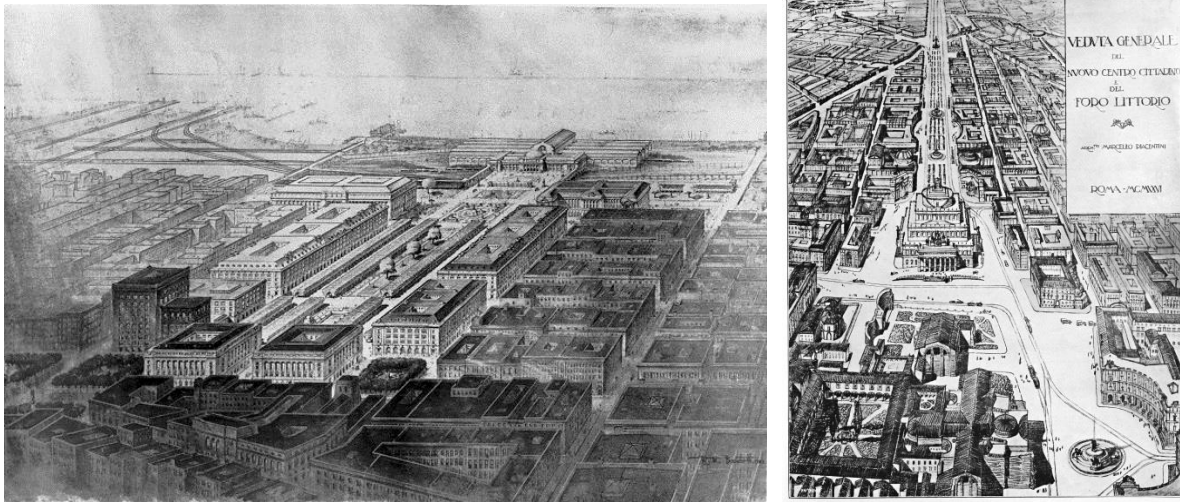
### The Layout of Piacentini's Civic Center

Due to his *Beaux Arts* training, Piacentini was familiar with German and Austrian monumental squares from the 19<sup>th</sup> Century, such as the "Kaiser-" or "Königsplätze" in Berlin, Strasburg and Vienna. Hegemann's book and Piacentini's own travels to Chicago and Berlin had furnished him with information about the US-American City Beautiful Movement and the competition entries for a Greater Berlin. Burnham's Cleveland Mall (1903), Bruno Möhring's Forum of the Empire (1910) and Otto Wagner's Plan einer Grozstadt (1911) have to be especially named.

<sup>24</sup> Piacentini 1936; Spiegel 2010; Piacentini 1942

<sup>25</sup> Piacentini 1936, Piacentini 1922

It does not astonish that Piacentini took these *Beaux Arts* schemes as design patterns when he tried to develop a monumental square to represent the fascist society. To promote his project of a Greater Rome, Piacentini designed a public square for the Termini-station in 1926. Emanating from a round shaped palace called Lictorian Palace, an axis passes the domiciles of national theatres, post, telecommunication, newspaper and syndicates, a thermal bath and a bourse. Columns, porticos, niches, exedras and domes dominate the architecture and recall Gottfried Semper's opera in Dresden as well as the antique roman forums that were excavated at the time.<sup>26</sup>



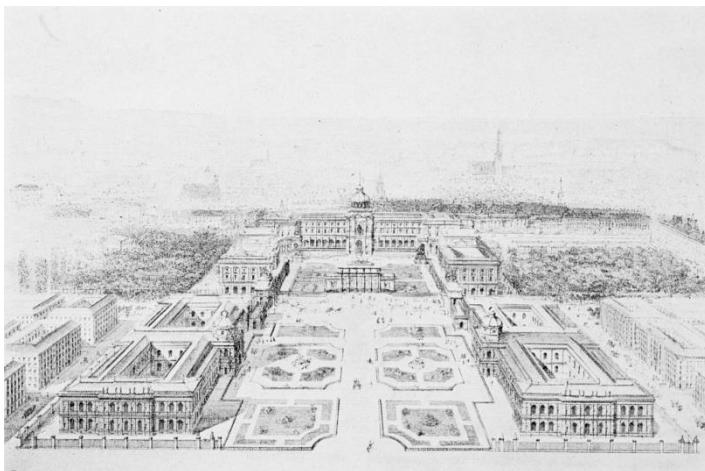
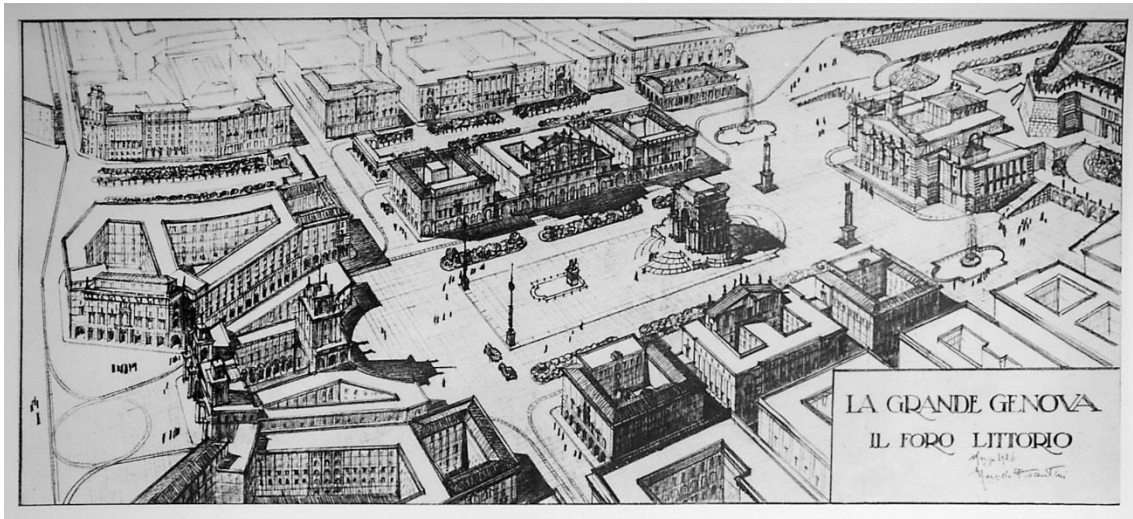
*Daniel Burnham, sketch of the Civic Center in Cleveland 1903. Source: Hegemann 1922, 139.*

*Marcello Piacentini, bird's eye view of the new Civic Center "Foro Littorio", Rome 1926. Source: Torriano 1926, 406.*

*Marcello Piacentini, sight of the "Foro Littorio", Rome 1926. Source: Torriano 1926, 406.*

<sup>26</sup> Torriano 1926

In the same year Piacentini designed a similar square for Genova, called Lictorian Forum. Situated at the edge of the ancient city the monumental square is characterized by an axis leading from the Lictorian Palace to the train station, flanked by museums, a triumphal arch and a monument for the Risorgimento-hero Goffredo Mamèli. While the roman Forum was criticized as an archaeologist's exercise without a modern fascist character, the Genovese square was accepted as a civic center and realized between 1936 and 1938. Particularly its axial plan, its public functions and its décor mark the Forum's relation to Semper's Kaiserforum in Vienna and show the continuity in civic design over the centuries.<sup>27</sup>



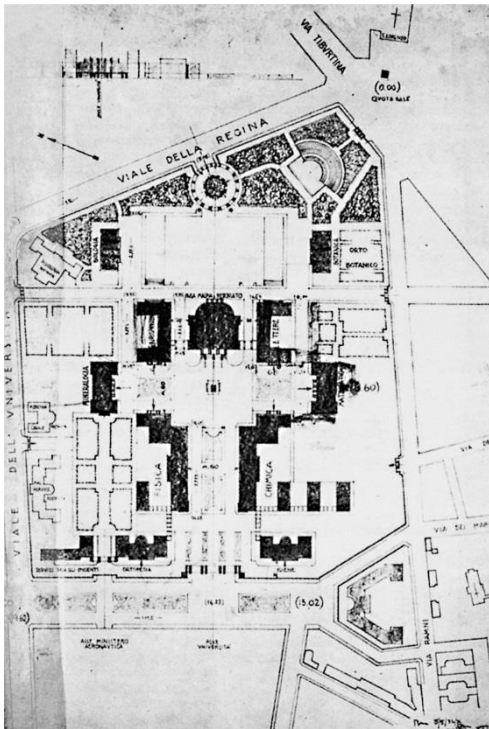
*Marcello Piacentini, bird's eye view of the new Civic Center "Foro Littorio", Genoa 1926. Source: Forno 1986, 330.*

*Gottfried Semper, sketch of the planned Imperial Forum in Vienna. Source: Hegemann 1922, 19.*

When Piacentini designed the master plan for a university city of Rome in 1932, he had the layout of Columbia University Campus in mind which he presumably had visited in 1914. Piacentini did not only make use of the axial plan for his first drafts but he also sketched a domed main building to house the universities library. The idea of an open air theatre located in parkland at the rear of the area was taken from Howard's Berkeley Campus. After various transformations, Piacentini's composition resembled the plan of a basilica, opened by an entrance, flanked by a row of buildings and hierarchically orientated towards the main building.<sup>28</sup>

<sup>27</sup> Forno 1986

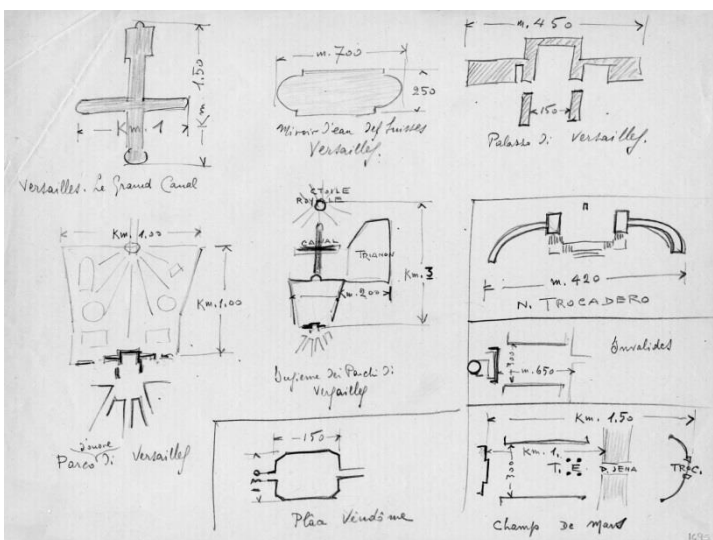
<sup>28</sup> Piacentini 1935; Regni Sennato 1985



Marcello Piacentini, Roman University City 1932.  
Source: Piacentini 1935, 3.

Mc Kim, Mead and White, Columbia University Campus, New York 1896. Source: Hegemann 1922, 119.

In the tradition of Leon Battista, Alberti Piacentini saw the city in analogy to the house and designed urban squares like interior-rooms. The University campus forms a basilica; the civic center was named the “parlour” of the city. A sequence of “open-air-rooms” also forms the basis of Piacentini’s master plan for the World’s Exhibition of 1942. The entrance is marked by an oval square that leads to a rectangular space and opens the view towards a monument situated on a hill and surrounded by water. While the sequence of squares repeats the layout of the roman forums, suggestive elements such as the lake are taken from Eliel Saarinen’s plan for Canberra (1911) as well as from other international exhibitions.<sup>29</sup> In its dimensions the roman areal corresponds to the Champ de Mars in Paris, venue of an exhibition in 1937 and sketched by Piacentini on this occasion.<sup>30</sup>

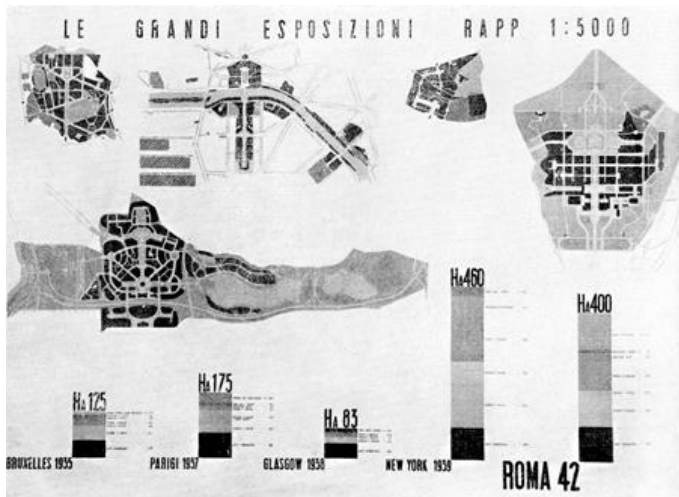


Marcello Piacentini, measurements of Parisian squares.  
Source: Lupano 1990, 128.

<sup>29</sup> Lupano 1990

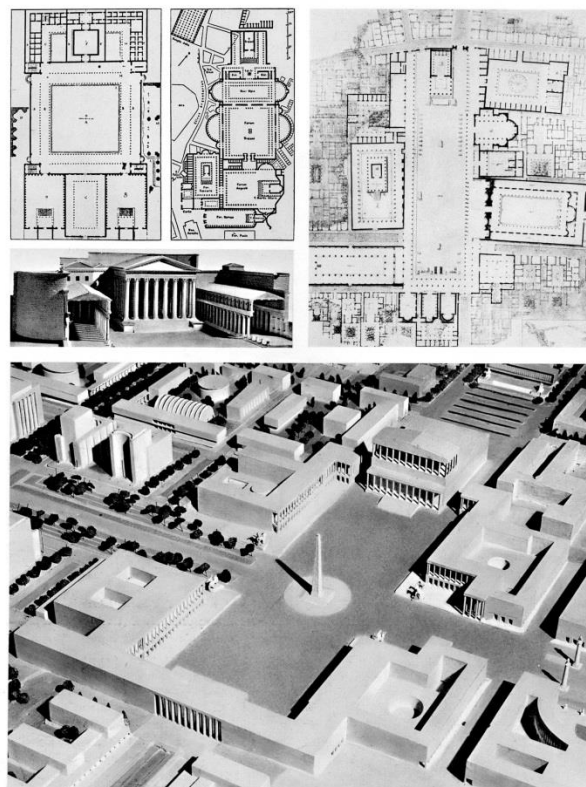
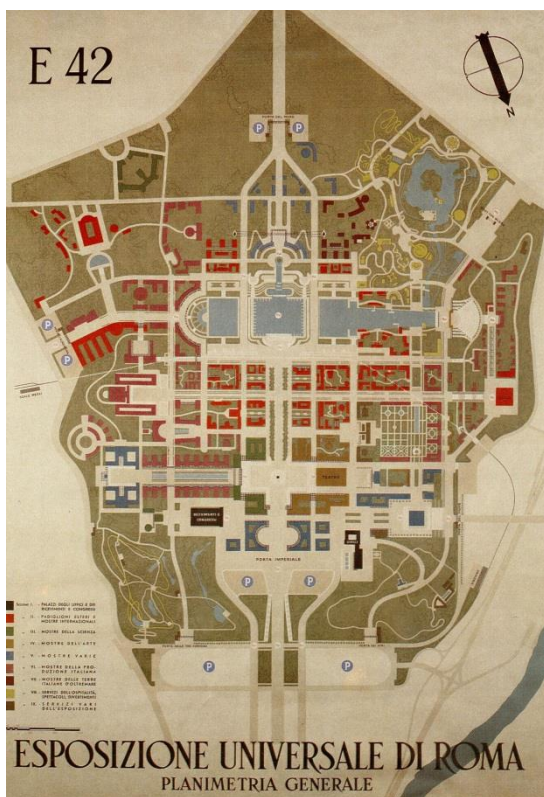
<sup>30</sup> Piacentini 1940; Anonym 1938; Mariani 1990





Comparison of the exhibition plans for Brussels, Paris, Glasgow, New York and Rome. Source: N.d.R. 1938, 752.

Marcello Piacentini et. al., master plan "Esposizione Universale di Roma 1942", October 1939. Source: Calvesi 1987, 201.



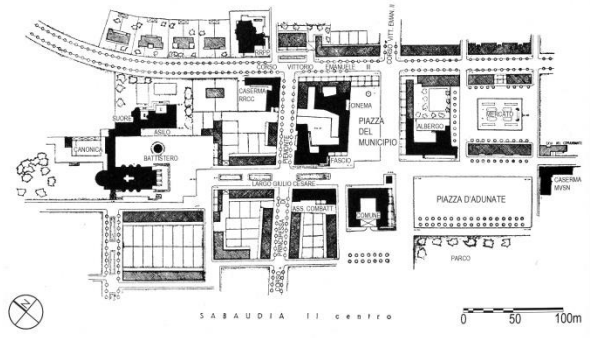
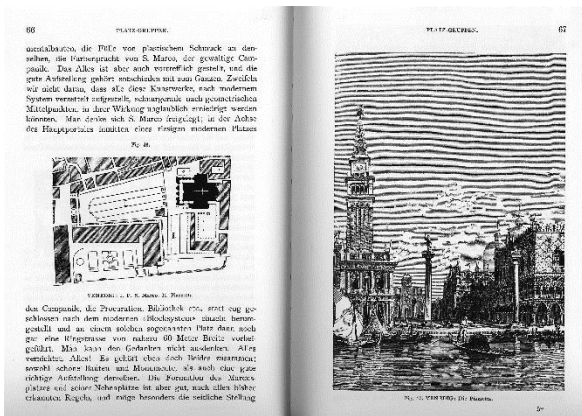
Marcello Piacentini, comparison of Piazza Imperiale (EUR) and the imperial forums in Rome. Source: Piacentini 1940, 27.

But Piacentini did not commit himself to the *Beaux Arts* prototype. Especially in the case of smaller cities, whose squares were located in the historic centre, Piacentini adhered to the picturesque scheme, as developed for downtown Bergamo. Between 1928 and 1932 he designed the L-shaped Piazza della Vittoria in Bergamo, inspired by Piazza San Marco in Venice. The business square is warily integrated into the existing urban tissue and creates suggestive lines of sight. In combination with the already existing market- and public squares the area forms a group of squares, characteristic of historic towns and described in Sittes book on artistic town planning.<sup>31</sup> Piacentini's assistant Piccinato will apply this concept on the master plan for the new town Sabaudia in 1932.

<sup>31</sup> Robecchi 1998



Marcello Piacentini, Piazza della Vittoria in Brescia. Source: [www.bresciavintage.it](http://www.bresciavintage.it) (10.03.2015)



Piazza San Marco in Venice, taken from Camillo Sitte's book "City Planning According to Artistic Principles" (*Der Städtebau nach seinen künstlerischen Grundsätzen*). Source: Sitte 1889, 66-67.

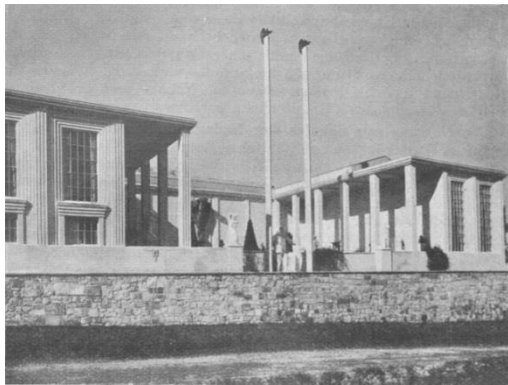
Luigi Piccinato et al., square group in the new town Sabaudia. Source: Spiegel 2010, 128.

## Résumé

The beginning of Piacentini's career coincides with the heyday of architectural town planning as a discipline. In Europe as well as in the United States approaches for civic design were developed and discussed among architects, engineers, critics and politicians. A vivid exchange between the different nations and generations lead to the creation of international institutions such as the IFHTP and of university chairs in civic design. Piacentini took part in this development; he assimilated the different models and created his own doctrine, appropriate to the specific needs of Italian cities. Being the first Italian professor in civic design, he was free to design his own curriculum and had the chance to educate several generations of students who themselves became important town planners and left their marks on postwar urbanism.

Piacentini integrated international town-planning schemes into his work; he admired the European Capitals of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and tried to transform Rome into a metropolis equal to Paris, Vienna or Berlin. But he did not search to play a part in the formation of international institutions; he did not participate in a lot of congresses and he did not develop a consistent theory, published as handbooks. His interest remained attached to specific Italian needs, to single towns with individual challenges. On that score Piacentini remained a romantic architect. Like Sitte, he understood the city as a piece of art and insisted on its individual character and on site-specific design. Therefore he could not follow Le Corbusier and other modernists who tended to dissolve the conventional city.

In terms of architectural style, Piacentini was influenced by a monumental classicism that dates back to the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, to the work of Peter Behrens and that of a younger Wilhelm Kreis. Therefore Piacentini's design strategy for the World's Exhibition did not originate from Albert Speer's plans for a new German capital. It resulted from Piacentini's admiration for the antique Roman forum, the Greek agora and for the *Beaux Arts* spaces of precedent International Exhibitions. With the E 42 and its Palazzo degli Uffici dell'Ente Autonomo EUR, Piacentini returned to his starting point – to Josef Hoffmann's pavilion and to the Roman exhibition of 1911.



*Josef Hoffmann, Austrian Pavilion at the Roman Exhibition 1911. Source: Brüstlein 1911, 534.*

*Gaetano Minnucci, EUR-agency Office, Rome 1939. Source: eurspa.it. (20.03.2015)*

In terms of political representation Piacentini remained attached to formal patterns developed during the 19<sup>th</sup> century. As critics stated, his first proposals for a fascist square resembled the French *Beaux Arts* squares and did not dispose of design elements that could essentially be called fascist. It is a paradox that Piazza della Vittoria in Brescia of all squares became the model of fascist civic art. Arcades, a tower and a variety of prospects, thus picturesque motives introduced by Piacentini in Bergamo and Brescia, became standard elements of Italian town squares during the 1930s.

*English version revised by Karl Eckert*

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